

CD 2005--11/12

FACULTY *of* MUSIC



2004-2005

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Friday, February 25, 2005
8 pm. Walter Hall

University of Toronto Faculty of Music
Faculty Artist Series
Presents

Beethoven Violin Sonatas

Scott St. John, violin | Lydia Wong, piano

PROGRAM

Violin Sonata No. 8 in G major, Op. 30/3

Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro assai

1770-1827

Tempo di Minuetto

Allegro vivace

Violin Sonata No. 9 in A major, Op. 47 "Kreutzer"

Adagio sostenuto - Presto

Andante con variazioni

Presto

INTERMISSION

Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96

Allegro moderato

Adagio espressivo

Scherzo: Allegro - Trio

Poco Allegretto

A portion of the ticket revenues from the Faculty Artist Series will be used
to fund student awards at the Faculty of Music

This concert is performed on the Edith McConica Steinway piano

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Program Notes

Sonatas for Violin and Piano, Nos. 8, 9 and 10

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born in Bonn, 1770

Died in Vienna 1827

"The more his hearing failed, and those intestinal troubles which in the last years of his life also afflicted him gained the upper hand, the more rapidly there also developed the ominous symptoms of a torturing hypochondria. He commenced to complain about a world which was all evil, intent only on delusion and deceit: about malice, betrayal and treachery. He insisted that there were no longer any honest men, saw the darkest side of everything, and at length even began to suspect his housekeeper, who had proven herself by many years of service."

This rather depressing account of Beethoven by Ignaz von Seyfried is a portrayal of the great composer in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1802 Beethoven realized he was slowly going deaf – documenting his grief in the famous Heiligenstadt Testament. By 1814 he required an ear-trumpet as a hearing aid, and three years later he began to use his "conversation books" in which visitors would write, rather than speak, to him.

The influence of Beethoven's encroaching deafness on his music has generated much speculation in musicological circles: one Beethoven biographer, Maynard Solomon, has gone so far as to suggest that "deafness may have heightened his abilities as a composer." It is an apt question to raise once again on this occasion, as all three sonatas performed on this recital were composed during the years when his hearing was failing.

Sonata No. 8 in G Op. 30 No. 3

This work is the last of the *Op. 30* set of violin and piano sonatas, published in 1803 and dedicated to Emperor Alexander of Russia, whom Beethoven considered an "enlightened despot." Composed in three movements it is, generally speaking, cheerful in character, and owes much to the influence of Haydn. The opening sonata-allegro movement bursts with energy, and is dominated by cascading scales and arpeggios in eighth- and sixteenth-notes. A stately, slightly wistful, minuet follows, in which the piano's role as a melody instrument is brought to the fore. As well, this movement features some clever hemiola figures which, in effect, bring the piece into a 2/4 metre for several measures. The extroverted *moto perpetuo* character of the opening movement is recalled in this sonata's finale: a rondo in the style of a country dance.

Sonata No. 9 in A Op. 47 "The Kreutzer"

This sonata was published in 1803 and dedicated to the Parisian virtuoso Rodolphe Kreutzer, who is said to have described it as "outrageously unplayable." (Kreutzer never performed it: the sonata was premiered by George Bridgetower, an African-English violinist who lived in Vienna in the early nineteenth century.) Beethoven described the work as "almost like a concerto," and in this work the composer exceeded all extant models of the violin-piano sonata.

From the opening phrases for unaccompanied violin playing double-stops it is apparent that the "Kreutzer" is a unique work. The opening movement – a sonata of imposing magnitude – is mostly in A minor, despite its nominal A-major tonality. Technically challenging, this piece is also interpretively demanding, requiring from

both performers a constant shifting of mood: dark turbulence alternates with dramatic outbursts and sections of uneasy repose. The second movement is a theme and variations in F major. The serene theme soon gives way to the playfulness, sentimentality and brilliance of the four variations.

The last movement was in fact written first: originally intended as the conclusion to the *Op. 30 No. 1* sonata, Beethoven deemed the piece too weighty for that work and decided to write a new sonata of suitable proportions for this grand finale. Marked "Presto," this furious piece at times resembles a tarantella-dance. Short tranquil passages offer moments of respite from the movement's lively tempo, and minor-key excursions provide tonal contrast.

The "Kreutzer" is not only Beethoven's most popular violin-piano sonata, it has served as the genesis for other works of art: it was the subject of a short story by Tolstoy, which in turn inspired a string quartet by Janáček.

Sonata No. 10 in G major Op. 96
Nine years elapsed following the "Kreutzer" before Beethoven returned to the violin-piano sonata genre. His last such work, the *Sonata No. 10 in G major Op. 96*, composed for the violinist Pierre Rode and dedicated to Archduke Rudolf, is one of only three violin-piano sonatas that the composer wrote in four movements.

The first movement begins with a statement in its opening theme in a graceful "Allegro Moderato" tempo. An understated and delicate work, the movement's outward innocence belies the intricacy of both the violin and piano parts. The second movement, marked "Adagio Espressivo," is infused with a warm religiosity that anticipates Brahms. Again, there is a seeming simplicity to this lyrical piece in ABA form, yet the climax is a brilliant example of harmonic and dynamic control.

The "extra" movement in this sonata is a scherzo, which follows from the Adagio Espressivo without a break. An unusual, arrestingly short piece, it begins in G minor and ends in G major. The final movement is a set of variations on a jaunty theme. The variations are full of contrast: dramatic, effervescent and solemn, among other things.

What do these three sonatas tell us about the influence of Beethoven's increasing deafness? The question is ultimately unanswerable: he proved himself a musical genius long before he went deaf, and it is impossible to know exactly how he would have composed had he not lost his hearing. But perhaps one thing we can ascertain is that the diversity, brilliance and originality of these works testify to a rich inner artistic life – despite the dour, anti-social exterior the composer often showed to the world.

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Biographies

Scott St. John captures the attention of the musical world through his riveting and virtuosic performances on violin, and viola. This charismatic artist has been praised for his "electric" performances and recitals "brimming with extroverted spirit," still, his exciting talents always serve the music. As the Pittsburgh Press has noted, "he is a musician of impeccable taste and natural instincts. He lets the music do the talking." Additional recognition for his skill and insight came in spring 2003, when he was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Scott St. John's current season includes returns to the Philadelphia, Vancouver and Winnipeg for recitals in repertoire that spans three centuries, features both violin and viola, and includes a world premiere. This season also marks his third appearance at Lincoln Center's "What Makes It Great Series" in New York. In addition, St. John will return to the Edmonton Symphony under the baton of Franz Paul Decker for performances of the Barber Concerto and serve as a senior participant on a Musicians from Marlboro tour of France, among other appearances.

Highlights of past seasons include vibrant performances of Bartok, Dvorák and Korngold Concertos throughout North America, and the American premiere of Peter Maxwell Davies' "A Spell for Green Corn", conducted by Keith Lockhart. Audiences of the Boston Pops, Cleveland, Philadelphia and National Arts Centre (Ottawa) Orchestras, and those of the Cincinnati, Grand Rapids, Toledo, Montreal, Toronto, Utah and Vancouver Symphonies, among others, have also shared in St. John's obvious joy in performing.

Abroad, St. John has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Flemish Radio Orchestra, Lisbon's Gulbenkian Orchestra,

the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, New Zealand Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic in London and the Hamburg Sinfonia. He made his debut in Japan, performing with the late Alexander Schneider, and in recitals in Osaka and Hiroshima. He recently returned to Japan for Gala performances in Tokyo's Casals Hall.

Winner of the 1989 Young Concert Artists Award, St. John made his New York City recital debut to critical acclaim in the 1991 Young Concert Artists Series at the 92nd Street Y. Playing violin, viola and MIDI violin, he made his Washington, DC recital debut in the 1993 Series at the Kennedy Center. In recent seasons, Scott has performed in recital on Ravinia's Rising Stars Series, at Spivey Hall(GA), as well as at Boston's Gardner Museum, Pepperdine University(CA), the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, DC's Freer Gallery, the La Jolla Chamber Music Society, the Tilles Center(NY) and Ruth Eckerd Hall(FL). His recital for the University of Wyoming, part of a statewide tour, was featured on NPR's "Performance Today". He has also been featured on A&E's "Breakfast with the Arts".

An avid chamber musician, St. John frequently performs with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (NY), Da Camera of Houston, on nationwide Musicians from Marlboro tours, and at the Seattle, Spoleto, and Vancouver music festivals. European festival engagements include France's Evian Music Festival, Germany's Schloss Moritzburg Chamber Music Festival, and the Spoleto Festival in Italy. Interested in creative programming, Scott served as Founder and Artistic Director of Millennium, a contemporary music ensemble for top young chamber musicians, from 1994-97, and in 1998 his "Chamber Music Company" launched a new series that included world premieres

and multi-media collaborations in New York City's Merkin Hall. Deeply committed to education and outreach, St. John employs his exceptional communication skills to connect with and inspire students and adults alike. St. John currently holds a prestigious performance/faculty position at the University of Toronto, and frequently serves as a faculty member at the Encore School for Strings.

Scott St. John's recordings can be heard on Marquis Classics, NAXOS, CRI, and Ancalagon Records. His newest release, "Salon Parisien" is on CBC records. A project to record the Brahms Sonatas for violin and viola is forthcoming.

In addition to a 2003 Avery Fisher Career Grant, his many awards include Young Concert Artists, the 1994 Virginia D. Moore Award for Most Promising Young Canadian Artist, Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, First Prize in the 1987 Alexander Schneider Violin and Viola Competition and a top prize in the 1992 Munich International Violin Competition.

Born in London, Ontario, St. John began his violin studies at age three with Richard Lawrence and subsequently worked with Gerard Jarry in Paris and David Cerone of the Cleveland Institute of Music. He studied viola with Ralph Aldrich of the University of Western Ontario and Robert Vernon, principal viola of the Cleveland Orchestra. In 1990, St. John graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied violin with Jascha Brodsky and Arnold Steinhardt, and chamber music with Felix Galimir.

One of Canada's most sought after collaborative pianists, acclaimed for her 'vivacious playing' (Daily Telegraph) and 'sparkling clarity' (The Strad), **Lydia Wong** appears regularly with the world's pre-eminent performers. Venues across the globe from Carnegie Recital Hall in New York City to London's Wigmore Hall have

featured her expertise in partnership with such artists as Lorand Fenyves, Patrick Gallois, Nobuko Imai, Arto Noras, Erika Raum, Shauna Rolston, and Scott St. John.

Following her successful Banff Centre collaboration with Krzysztof Penderecki on the North American premiere of his *Sextet*, Ms. Wong has enjoyed a particular association with the composer. She was invited to perform the *Sextet* and other works at the Festival Casals in Puerto Rico and at the "Making Music" series in New York City by Carnegie Hall. In 2003, with violinist Erika Raum, she gave the North American premiere of Penderecki's Violin Sonata No.2 in Toronto; she also performed at Maestro Penderecki's 70th birthday celebration in Warsaw, Poland and served as a member of the jury for the Seventh Annual International Contemporary Chamber Music Competition in Krakow, Poland. In the fall, Ms. Wong and Erika Raum will be recording all of Maestro Penderecki's work for violin and piano.

Active in New Music Ms. Wong performed as soloist with the Esprit Orchestra in *...quasi una fantasia...* by Gyorgy Kurtag. CentreDiscs has released her recording of Alexina Louie's Piano Quintet with the Accordes String Quartet and will be following this with a disc of the music of Melissa Hui. Volume one of French music for flute and piano recorded with Patrick Gallois will be issued on the Naxos label this March. She can also be heard on Marquis Classics and Phoenix Records and has performed for networks in North America, Africa and Europe besides broadcasting regularly for the CBC.

A graduate of the University of Toronto and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Ms. Wong currently teaches at the University of Toronto, and is a faculty member of the summer music program at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Last summer, she taught and performed at the Casals Festival in Prades, France.

University of Toronto Faculty of Music

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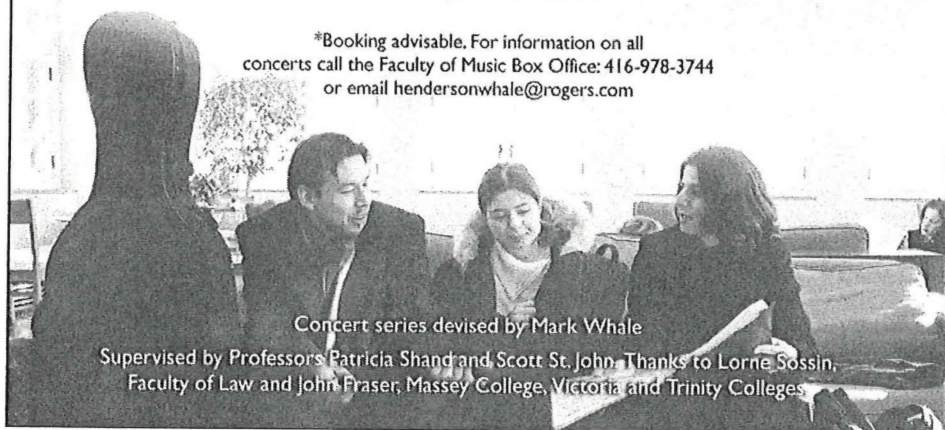
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Concert series devised by Mark Whale

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